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ABSTRACT

Vocational education's mission in economic development calls for a more active and assertive posture at the national, state, and local levels. If vocational education programs are to meet the challenges posed by the increase of new technologies, vocational administrators must develop a system for updating vocational staff for hiring more instructors from business and industry, for channeling research and development funds to establish a data-based planning and management system to aid in improving training methods and developing systems, and for working together with business and industry to develop competency-based instructional materials. Among the national-level actions necessary to secure vocational education's role in the economic development scheme are the following: development of incentives for states to design training programs needed for reindustrialization, productivity improvement, and national defense concerns; provision of funds for modern facilities and technical equipment; and revision of the existing "apprenticeship training" definition to encourage use of competency-based training programs. Furthermore, state vocational education agencies should develop their comprehensive state plans to include, among other things, development of "fast response" delivery systems for new innovations in high technology areas and provision of outreach programs to locate unemployed, disadvantaged, and handicapped workers and to deliver counseling, training, and support services to them. (MN)

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The Role and Responsibility of Vocational Education in Economic Development and Productivity

BOOK 2

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Position Statement of National Association of State Directors of Vocational Education

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The Role and Responsibility of Vocational Education in Economic Development and Productivity

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INTRODUCTION

Vocational education has grown up with and responded to the needs of a relatively young nation built by dedicated, hardworking, and innovative peoples. During the first 60 years of the twentieth century, the United States established itself as the major industrial and agricultural power in the world. The United States clothed, transported, and fed much of the world while also assisting in the rebuilding of countries that were devastated by war or natural disasters. Americans walked on the moon and conquered what was believed to be unconquerable.

As the United States developed and accumulated the assets of advancing technologies, it also incurred the debts and liabilities of a diminishing level of productivity, an increase in crime, and a growth in the number of people receiving welfare. The country has started to lose its position as the world leader. Several nations have now surpassed America in the annual rate of productivity growth. America, in terms of productivity growth, is ranked eleventh behind such countries as France, Italy, Japan, and West Germany. America is still the leader in the production of goods and services, but if current trends continue, the United States will become a fourth- or fifth-ranking world power within this decade.[1]

America, once the foremost exporter of goods, now imports more goods than it markets abroad. Foreign nations can import American raw materials, convert these into manufactured goods, and sell these products back to the United States at a price lower than these goods can be produced in the United States. Foreign nations can produce these goods more economically and, in many instances, at a higher quality than that of American manufactured goods. The impact of America's inability to effectively compete on the world market is substantial. As America loses her competitiveness in the world market, unemployment rises, the value of the dollar declines, and inflation and the national debt increase, which result in a loss of real income and a lower standard of living for Americans.

The number of young adults in the 14- to 24-year-old age bracket will decline by 2.7 million between 1977 and 1990, while those in the 25- to 54-year-old age bracket, the aging post-World War II "baby boom" generation, will grow by 22.8 million, a rise of 30 percent. By 1985, there will be 74 million adults in this age bracket occupying jobs, and by 1990, that figure will swell to 83.5 million. The number of youth in the 16- to 19-year-old age bracket has already begun to decline.[2]

The United States is on the threshold of what has been referred to as the "slow-growth 80s" as described by David Bushnell. Bushnell quotes a number of sources, one of which is Leonard Lecht who indicates that America is entering a decade of lower economic growth, with the job-seeking and underemployed young adults of the 1970s becoming the employable, more productive citizens of the 1980s. Such a shift reflects the move, in a few short years, of the population gravity center from early adulthood to middle adulthood. It will also be a decade characterized by shrinking college enrollments, declining numbers of young adults, and some slight improvements in the employment of minorities and the disadvantaged.[3]

The purpose of this paper is to identify current areas of concern and to suggest several issues vocational educators need to consider as implementation strategies are developed.

DEFINITIONS AND MISSION

Definitions of Economic Development and Productivity

Authors frequently use the term "economic development" in articles and speeches about vocational education. Yet when the literature is reviewed, few authors identify what they mean by the term economic development.

The State Directors of Vocational Education endorse the following definition:

> Economic development is a set of planned actions designed to:
>
> - Attract new industry.
> - Expand existing industry.
> - Revitalize existing industry.
> - Increase the productivity growth rate.

As a result of these actions, the economic base and the quality of life will be positively changed in a state or nation.

The State Directors endorse the following definition of the term "productivity":

> Productivity is the relationship of input to output.

Mission

Vocational education's mission in economic development calls for a more active and assertive posture at the national, state, and local levels. If vocational education is to meet the challenges of revitalizing the industrial/business base to maintain an active and productive economy, then all vocational educators must recognize the indisputable fact that vocational education is a system for increasing the skills of the work force and improving the ability of American industry to compete at home and abroad.

Vocational education has responded effectively to challenges relative to the economic independence of our country. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, vocational education implemented the federal alphabet programs which emphasized adult training under the Work Relief in Education Program. World War II saw many of America's vocational and adult schools operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, providing concentrated training for occupations critical to national defense. During the 1950s, the American people demanded, and received, significant development in technical education programs. Employers upgraded their production and service techniques as electronic, automotive, and mechanical technology advanced. The challenge of the 1980s for vocational education is to encourage development of a united effort between government, business, industry, labor, and education to increase productivity and to enhance economic growth. This effort should be implemented by the establishment of a national training policy. Such a policy would support a comprehensive human resource developmental effort for educating and training America's work force.

ROLE

History suggests that the role of vocational education in economic development has never been at the forefront in the philosophy, organization, or operation of traditional vocational education programs.

The role of vocational education in economic development is not mentioned in federal legislation. It is not included in most state plans for vocational education. It cannot be found in the annals of accomplishments of vocational education. Even the dramatic accomplishments in economic development documented for some vocational education programs go unnoticed and unheralded by the national leadership. Is it any wonder then that vocational educators have viewed their role in economic development and the creation of jobs only in the abstract?[4]

Vocational education programs at the adult and post-secondary levels can be expected to grow faster than at the secondary level, partly because of the large number of adults who will seek additional or new marketable skills during the 1980s.[3]

- The increase of new technologies will create myriad opportunities for vocational education at all levels. If vocational education is sensitive to the impact and magnitude of shifts in employment opportunities resulting from the creation of new jobs, close ties must be established with industry, particularly smaller high-technology firms. To meet the needs for jobs during the next decade, our labor force must increase 1.5 million employees a year (as contrasted with 2.3 million average annual rate of growth during the 1970s).[3]
- Businesses are likely to become even more strongly interested in vocational programs and students. As young labor-market recruits become harder to find and as sophisticated new technologies offer more efficient ways of accomplishing certain tasks, a substantial increase in customized industrial-training programs should be expected. Vocational education should utilize aggressive outreach efforts and continue training support for small business operators.[3]
- Development of a system for updating vocational staff is essential. The more rapidly business and industry change, the more rapidly vocational instructors become technically obsolete. To remedy this, schools hire instructors from business and industry. These instructors have to be trained to teach their skill and to evaluate skill acquisition. This system should include (1) the identification of new and existing vocational staff who need training, (2) the provision for adequate ways to update them, and (3) the development of incentives for staff improvements.[5]
- The use of research and development funds for the establishment of a data-based planning and management system would greatly contribute to program improvement. Current and future training needs based upon economic and demographic studies will allow vocational education to assume a more pro-active, rather than re-active, role in providing services. Active research provides greater delineation of appropriate training methods and delivery systems for maximum on-the-job performance.
- Vocational education in cooperation with business and industry must develop competency-based instructional materials. This cooperation will provide the basic materials needed for development of customized industrial training programs, thus increasing the credibility of vocational education with industry. The benefits derived from using competency-based instructional materials are:
  a. Employers assist with the validation of competencies.
  b. Programs can be open-entry, open-exit.
  c. Evaluation of learners is much easier.
  d. Articulation is easier to accomplish.
  e. Credibility with industry is enhanced.
  f. Students have the opportunity to advance in apprenticeship training programs.

STATE AND NATIONAL DIRECTIONS

The National Association of State Directors of Vocational Education believes that policies and investments should (1) support programs of vocational and technical education, (2) provide the resources to expand and upgrade the current delivery system to meet the changing needs of our economy, and (3) provide leadership to stimulate economic growth.

The economy grows as new businesses are formed. Small businesses are the principal sources of new ideas, of new economic growth, and of new work opportunities. A study showed that 88 percent of all new jobs in America in the last five years were created by companies with 20 employees or less. An astounding 70 percent of these companies were less than five years old.[6]

Industries within the U.S. are responding to foreign competition and the declining productivity rate by engaging in large-scale capital outlays for restructuring and reequipping plants to increase productivity and reduce labor and energy costs. The result is an introduction of new equipment of a more complex technology which is computerized and automated. The high cost of this equipment is currently deferring vocational education from assuming a more prominent role in training.

Every state has a job-training program, but only a few appear to be making a significant impact on economic development. Too often these programs suffer from serious fragmentation, poor information, inadequate research capabilities, a lack of relevance to the realities of the labor market, and ineffective coordination between job training and job placement. Obviously, improving job-training efforts alone will not solve all of a state's labor market problems. The single most effective employment strategy is a strong economy. Job-training programs are important in supporting a state's overall economic development effort.[7]

National Directions

The National Association of State Directors of Vocational Education suggests that national leadership should be devoted to a plan of economic development to include:

- A commitment to assist states in establishing strong support services for training and for vocational education programs that include (1) data-based planning, (2) human resources development strategies, (3) productivity-enhancement centers, (4) action research, (5) training materials, and (6) technical staff to support strategies which relate to the national purpose.

- Incentives for the states to develop strong and flexible training programs created by reindustrialization, productivity improvements, and national defense efforts.

- A provision which will provide funds for modern facilities and industrial/technical equipment.

- Greater financial support to provide (1) pre-employment training for new industries, (2) re-training for existing industries which are modernizing their plants and/or processes, and (3) specialized training for industries where there is an acute labor supply shortage.

- Increased support for individual state efforts, without inhibiting the states from establishing a variety of programs identified as training needs.

- Support for job-related entrepreneurial strategies.

- Encouragement and increased support for greater cooperation between vocational education and industrial/economic development efforts at the state level.

- A revision of the existing "apprenticeship training" definition to encourage usage of competency-based training programs. Direct support should be provided for related education, skill training, competency testing, and registration of apprentices and journeymen.

- A strong commitment to supporting consortiums of states for development of instructional materials related to job competencies.

- Establishment of a policy which provides for training in national defense industries and with the military.

- A strong commitment to and provisions for assisting individual states in technically updating vocational instructional and administrative personnel.

State Directions

Each state vocational education agency should develop its comprehensive state plan for economic development to include:

- Increasing the emphasis on vocational and technical education in secondary, adult, and post-secondary institutions.

- Developing "fast response" (i.e., quick start-up programs) delivery systems for new innovations in high-technology areas.

- Designing and customizing "red-tape free" delivery and governing arrangements to prepare workers for new and/or existing industries.

- Maintaining close liaison with business and industry and especially with small firms.

- Working closely with state and local chambers of commerce and manufacturers' associations, state and local economic development teams, industry-education labor councils, and "linking agents" in job-creation/economic development activities.

- Providing technical assistance and support to companies to promote innovation and improve productivity.

- Working closely with key legislators and their staffs, at both the state and national levels, in designing legislation that prevents unnecessary and costly duplication of employment and training services.

- Adopting more effective and efficient methods of developing and delivering education and training through the use of modern communication technology, up-to-date equipment, and curriculum development strategies.

- Emphasizing basic skill development programs conducted in collaboration with other responsible entities.

- Providing leadership for relevant and properly integrated general education, prevocational education, and vocational education at the secondary, adult, and post-secondary levels.

- Providing career counseling for upward and lateral mobility in the work force.

- Providing outreach programs to locate the unemployed, disadvantaged, and/or handicapped worker/citizen and to deliver counseling, assessment, training, and related supportive services necessary for assignment or reassignment to the work place.

- Working closely with university-based research departments to develop effective and efficient instructional methods and materials.

- Conducting continuous follow-up with employers and graduates to determine the viability of the vocational education delivery system and to make the necessary adjustments.

SUMMARY

Economic development should be a national concern with a high national priority. To solve the national economic problems will take the cooperation of both the private and public sectors.

The National Association of State Directors of Vocational Education agrees with the National Issues Committee of the American Society for Training and Development. Training will have a direct impact on our economy by increasing current productivity standards. Training must include "basic skills and work habits; industry generic skills, particularly where there are industry shortages; and quality of work life and employee participation programs."[8]

"An economic development strategy must focus on the overall economic climate. It must encompass a broad range of policies, including training programs, infrastructure development, and capital mobility, as well as a balanced tax structure."[9]

Emphasis should be placed on coordination with other agencies for budgeting processes, regulatory and licensing functions, policy planning, and the appointment of interagency coordinating committees. Continuation of federal grants for state economic development will enable state planning authorities to continue to integrate transportation, housing, and human resource development activities with the objective of optimizing a state's economic, social, and physical development.

States must realize that "most local employment growth occurs through the birth of new firms and the expansion of existing, small companies. Very little growth (or decline) results from the inmigration (or outmigration) of firms."[9]

To suggest that there is a single role for vocational education in economic development is deceptive. Complex problems are not generally amenable to simple solutions. No single model can suffice to describe all the ways in which vocational education can impact on job creation, job upgrading, and job saving. Vocational educators can examine some alternatives to enhance human resource development.

The major economic issue faced by vocational education is a problem of matching--not state dollars with federal dollars, or local dollars with state dollars, but one of matching people with resources. To bring about this change, a new mentality is needed--a mentality that says vocational education is a part of the economic-development scheme--vocational education does have a role, and the crystal ball can have new brilliance.

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